

# **BOOK REVIEW OF *EAT, PRAY, LOVE***

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This book review is concerned with Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love*. Gilbert's novel is full of real life experience that was undergone by Gilbert herself. Gilbert's story in this novel triggered the writer's curiosity to obtain a deep understanding of how the main character deals with how she survives from her anxiety about life.

*Eat, Pray, Love*, which the writer reviews in this final project, is the first edition of *Eat, Pray, Love*; it was published in 2006 by Penguin Books. The novel has 352 pages and 108 chapters, and it is basically divided into three main parts. Each part explains the story of Gilbert in each country that she visited: Italy, India, and Indonesia respectively.

The author of *Eat, Pray, Love* novel, Elizabeth Gilbert, is an American author; she was born in Waterbury, Connecticut in 1969. In her youth, she studied political science in New York University, and she became a part time short story writer. She started her trip to various countries right after her graduation from college, from where she later gathered her experiences first handed, and turned them into her works. Gilbert's works in the forms of articles, novels, and short stories have been awarded for her talent of writing.

Gilbert's first work, *The Last American Man*, was nominated for the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. However, she became more famous for her novel *Eat, Pray, Love* as a bestseller novel worldwide. The novel has been sold in more than ten million copies in over thirty languages. *Eat, Pray, Love* novel has made the author one of the hundred most influential people in the world by *Time Magazine*.

The writer uses the library research as the research method in her study of the novel. The library research is chosen since the references and the novel itself are based on the printed and digitized collection. Firstly, the writer collected three online reviews. Secondly, the writer analyzed the reviews to figure out how Gilbert solved her problems in life. Finally, the writer presented her analysis on Gilbert's survival in her life.

The significance of this book review is to show that the popularity of *Eat, Pray, Love* is inseparable from Gilbert's inspirational story, which brings about positive responses from the reviewers. The writer hopes that this book review could be beneficial to the readers who want to read this novel joyfully from various references.

## **RECENT REVIEWS**

The writer notes three recent reviews on Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love*. They are *PublisherWeekly*, *LosAngelesTimes* and Alan Richman (an American famous

journalist). The writer chooses those recent studies because the references are from reliable sources. Those reviewers are also credible with their expertises, and they have been hired to review other books. The reviews are displayed in the page of official Gilbert's site, i.e. [elizabethgilbert.com](http://elizabethgilbert.com).

The first review to be discussed is written by *PublisherWeekly*, and it says:

*"Gilbert (of The Last American Man) grafts the structure of romantic fiction upon the inquiries of reporting in this sprawling yet methodical travelogue of soul-searching and self-discovery. Plagued with despair after a nasty divorce, the author, in her early 30s, divides a year equally among three dissimilar countries, exploring her competing urges for earthly delights and divine transcendence. First, pleasure: savoring Italy's buffet of delights — the world's best pizza, free-flowing wine and dashing conversation partners — Gilbert consumes la dolce vita as spiritual succor. 'I came to Italy pinched and thin,' she writes, but soon fills out in waist and soul. Then, prayer and ascetic rigor: seeking communion with the divine at a sacred ashram in India, Gilbert emulates the ways of yogis in grueling hours of meditation, struggling to still her churning mind. Finally, a balancing act in Bali, where Gilbert tries for equipoise 'betwixt and between' realms, studies with a merry medicine man and plunges into a charged love affair. Sustaining a chatty, conspiratorial tone, Gilbert fully engages readers in the year's cultural and emotional tapestry — conveying rapture with infectious brio, recalling anguish with touching candor — as she details her exotic tableau with history, anecdote and impression."*

*by Publishers Weekly (Starred Review) (Copyright Reed Business Information, Inc.)*

According to *PublishersWeekly*, Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love* novel is such a soul-searching and self-discovery travelogue wrapped as an attractive story. The journeys which writer made are told based on Gilbert's anxiety about her life and her belief. The journeys were then made in three countries. Each country has given her different aspects of life between earthly delights and divine transcendence, which are "pleasure" (Italy) where she enjoyed both good food and people, "prayer and ascetic rigor" (India) where she gained her spiritual life, and "balancing act" (Indonesia) where she rebuilt herself. In this novel, not only Gilbert serves the readers with her experience and culture that she describes from those countries, she also wraps her story in a comical and remarkable way ("Reviews & Profiles: *PublishersWeekly*").

The writer considers that *PublishersWeekly* is quite good in reviewing this novel. Publishers Weekly mentions some essential points, like the background of Gilbert doing the trip, the reason of taking a shocking decision, and the travel itself. These points attract the readers even more to read the novel.

The second review is written by *Los Angeles Times* which says:

*"Gilbert's journey is full of mystical dreams, visions and uncanny coincidences...Yet for every ounce of self-absorption her classical New-Age journey demands, Gilbert is ready with an equal measure of intelligence, humor and self-deprecation...Gilbert's wry, unfettered account of her extraordinary journey makes even the most cynical reader*

*dare to dream of someday finding God deep within a meditation cave in India, or perhaps over a transcendent slice of pizza.”*  
by Erika Schickel

Los Angeles Times points out that this novel somehow is about uncanny coincidences, like divine coincidence. In her journey, Gilbert has brought the readers through her self-deprecation and sense of humor. Gilbert's unbound and extraordinary trip brings the readers to imagine her finding the peace from a meditation in India or a pleasant meal in Italy.

A good thing about Los Angeles Times' review is that they mention the purpose of Gilbert to travel the countries, which is finding a peace, yet they slightly mention the reason of why Gilbert needs to find the peace. However, the review from Los Angeles Times seems too general to depict the story of this novel (“Reviews & Profiles: Los Angeles Times”).

The other review comes from Alan Richman, an American famous journalist, he says:

*“Spilling out of this funny (and profound) circus car of a book are dozens of mesmerizing characters, people you’ll envy Liz Gilbert for finding, valuing, loving and, I couldn’t help noticing, joining for irresistible meals. I’ve never read an adventure quite like one, where a writer packs up her entire life and takes it on the road.”*  
by Alan Richman

Richman admits that he has never read any story like this novel. Gilbert's decision of dropping her entire life and does a travel amazes him. He states that the humorous trip of Elizabeth Gilbert in gaining experiences through her difficult time in life would envy the readers. However he does not touch any of Gilbert's struggles and problems that actually are the bases of her journey (“Reviews & Profiles: Alan Richman's take on *Eat, Pray, Love*”).

## REVIEWS

The previous chapter of the recent reviews shows that there are some issues that were not discussed yet, such as the basic reason why Gilbert is doing the travel and the background story of Gilbert's journey. Hence, in this chapter the writer discusses further the forgotten aspects of the novel from the recent reviews.

Based on the research method mentioned in the introduction, the writer quotes the lines from *Eat, Pray, Love* to show the forgotten aspects that were not mentioned in the reviews of the experts. The writer also quotes the lines that highlight the strong points of the reviews in her own review.

In *Publishers Weekly's* review, it is mentioned that Gilbert's journey is about a travelogue of her soul-searching and self-discovery; her nasty divorce, and the three different countries. *PublishersWeekly* also mentions the summary of Gilbert's trip to the three countries. The summary can be inferred directly from the novel as:

*It wasn't so much that I wanted to thoroughly explore the countries themselves; this has been done. It was more that I wanted to thoroughly explore one aspect of myself set against the backdrop of each country, in*

*a place that has traditionally done that one thing very well. I wanted to explore the art of pleasure in Italy, the art of devotion in India and, in Indonesia, the art of balancing the two.*(Page 41)

*That divorce—long after I'd walked out of my marriage—was still not happening. I'd started having to put legal pressure on my husband, doing dreadful things out of my worst divorce nightmares,...* (Page 41)

*So I stopped trying to choose—Italy? India? or Indonesia?—and eventually just admitted that I wanted to travel to all of them. Four months in each place. A year in total.* (Page 41)

*I came to Italy pinched and thin.* (Page 128)

*The easiest, most fundamental- ally human way to say it is that I have put on weight. I exist more now than I did four months ago. I will leave Italy noticeably bigger than when I arrived here.* (Page 128)

*The next morning's meditation is a disaster. Desperate, I beg my mind to please step aside and let me find God, but my mind stares at me with steely power and says, "I will never let you pass me by."* (Page 160)

*I limped into the shop with my sore knee and introduced myself to Wayan the healer—a strikingly attractive Balinese woman with a wide smile and shiny black hair down to her waist.* (Page 274)

*Felipe and I, as we discover to our delight, are a perfectly matched, genetically engineered belly-to-belly success story.* (Page 316)

In the writer's opinion, *PublishersWeekly* reviews the novel in a good way. This reviewer provides prospective readers of the novel with the strong points of the novel to intrigue the readers to read the novel. The strong points that *PublishersWeekly* provides are Gilbert's nasty divorce, the background of taking the shocking move, and Gilbert's unique survival, the three of which lead her to make a year travel to the three different countries along with the reasons to choose those countries.

Furthermore, *PublishersWeekly* states clearly the basic aspects, which become the strengths of the novel that the readers need to know; they become the essential points in this novel. The writer highlights that *Publishers Weekly's* reviews not only Gilbert's journey, but also the background of Gilbert's life and the struggle which she fights for. The balance of the review from *PublishersWeekly* can be seen in the way they presented the journey of the author in three countries. They wrote the experience of each country equally such as the pleasure she got in Italy, the religious activities in India and rebuilt her life. Hence, the review brings the best of this novel as the readers read the review of *Publishers Weekly*.

On the other hand, *LosAngelesTimes* in its review focuses on the purpose of Gilbert's adventure only. While Alan Richman's review puts the spotlight to the Gilbert's extreme decision in life. The similarity of both reviewers is pinpointing the remarkable experience that Gilbert has through the extraordinary journey.

The reviews of *LosAngelesTimes* and Alan Richman lack description of the strong points that the novel has. Unlike *PublishersWeekly*, the two of the latter reviews do not mention the main reason why Gilbert decides to leave everything she has for the uncertainty of life ahead. The two reviewers do not state the ironic background she undergoes before she does the trip either in their reviews, either. They do not mention Gilbert's reason for leaving her normal life by taking a year of journey to the three countries, either. In *LosAngelesTimes* review, two of three countries, Italy and India, that the author had visited were mentioned in only one simple sentence, whereas the other country, Indonesia, was not mentioned at all. Meanwhile, in *Alan Richman* review none of those countries were mentioned.

In the writer's point of view, the missing points are actually the strong points in this novel, which make this novel differently interesting than any other similar novels. The missing points of the reviews are the background of the author's journey and experiences in the three countries, which will complete the reviews if they are portrayed.

The followings are a number of forgotten aspects of *LosAngelesTimes* and Alan Richman's as follow:

*I don't want to be married anymore. I was trying so hard not to know this, but the truth kept insisting itself to me. (Page 19)*

*I don't want to be married anymore. I don't want to live in this big house. I don't want to have a baby. (Page 19)*

*Months passed. My life hung in limbo as I waited to be released, waited to see what the terms would be. We were living separately (he had moved into our Manhattan apartment), but nothing was resolved. Bills piled up, careers stalled, the house fell into ruin and my husband's silences were broken only by his occasional communications reminding me what a criminal jerk I was. (Page 28)*

*I thought I had fallen to bits before, but now (in harmony with the apparent collapse of the entire world) my life really turned to smash. (Page 29)*

*I have quit my job, paid off my divorce settlement and legal bills, given up my house, given up my apartment, put what belongings I had left into storage in my sister's place and packed up two suitcases. My year of traveling has commenced. (Page 46)*

The quotes above show Gilbert's struggle in her life, which becomes the story background of her journey. In first two quoted lines, Gilbert's feeling toward her failed marriage builds a major reason for her quest for a peace by escaping to the other countries. She has just realized that her life is in the lowest point that is showed in the fourth line. Additionally, in the third quoted lines she gives a picture of how her life turns into a fall down among the bad communication of the divorce and her career. While in the last quoted lines, Gilbert describes her first steps to start a different kind of life style for her year of travelling. In conclusion, the lines above describe her struggle to escape from the failed marriage and her life falling apart.

*For years, I'd wished I could speak Italian—a language I find more beautiful than roses—but I could never make the practical justification for studying it. Why not just bone up on the French or Russian I'd already studied years ago? Or learn to speak Spanish, the better to help me communicate with millions of my fellow Americans? What was I going to do with Italian? It's not like I was going to move there. It would be more practical to learn how to play the accordion.*

*But why must everything always have a practical application? I'd been such a diligent soldier for years—working, producing, never missing a deadline, taking care of my loved ones, my gums and my credit record, voting, etc. Is this lifetime supposed to be only about duty? In this dark period of loss, did I need any justification for learning Italian other than that it was the only thing I could imagine bringing me any pleasure right now? (Page 33)*

*Something about my recent joy in Naples has made me certain that I not only can find happiness without David, but must. No matter how much I love him (and I do love him, in stupid excess), I have to say goodbye to this person now. And I have to make it stick. (Page 97)*

In the quoted line above, it is explained how Gilbert struggles to find any possible pleasure to entertain herself in Italy. She convinces herself that learning Italian language might bring a pleasure that she really needs in some points. Gilbert also recalls her past life about everything she has done to fulfill her duties by justifying everything in order to have a practical application. From that moment, Gilbert starts to make a change by putting the practical application of learning Italian aside. In Italy Gilbert also brings her struggle to leave David behind (her former boyfriend), and she lets him go after finding a little joy in a small city named Naples. She finally gives a thought of letting go David after she realizes that she actually can live better without him.

*So when the old man asked me in person what I really wanted, I found other, truer words. "I want to have a lasting experience of God," I told him. "Sometimes I feel like I understand the divinity of this world, but then I lose it because I get distracted by my petty desires and fears. I want to be with God all the time. But I don't want to be a monk, or totally give up worldly pleasures. I guess what I want to learn is how to live in this world and enjoy its de- lights, but also devote myself to God." (Page 37)*

*The next morning's meditation is a disaster. Desperate, I beg my mind to please step aside and let me find God, but my mind stares at me with steely power and says, "I will never let you pass me by." (Page 160)*

*Then I shut my eyes and I said, "Dear Lord, please show me everything I need to under- stand about forgiveness and surrender." (Page 199)*

*Much later I opened my eyes, and I knew it was over. Not just my marriage and not just my divorce, but all the unfinished bleak hollow sadness of it . . . it was over. I could feel that I was free. (Page 200)*

Gilbert's struggle continues in India. She finds herself having a hard time to do the meditation to get close to God. Her main purpose of visiting India is to be with God and isolates herself from all earthly delights that often get her own mind distracted. Her effort to reconcile with herself is as strong as the denial of her mind. She begs God to let her see everything that she needs to see to forgive and to surrender. Finally, Gilbert's effort to fight her difficulties in India succeeds. She is able to let go her unfinished bleak hollow of sadness, which is her marriage. She can feel the air of freedom as her burden of sadness goes away when she accepts the fact of her divorce eventually.

*"To find the balance you want," Ketut spoke through his translator, "this is what you must become. You must keep your feet grounded so firmly on the earth that it's like you have four legs, instead of two. That way, you can stay in the world. But you must stop looking at the world through your head. You must look through your heart, instead. That way, you will know God."* (Page 38)

*I give up trying to hide my tearfulness and just let it all spill over. "Yes, Ketut. I was very sad before. But life is better now."* (Page 240)

*Maybe I'm not getting across how fun all this is. Truly, it's so much odd and satisfying fun, trying to figure all this out. Or maybe I'm just enjoying this surreal moment in my life so much because I happen to be falling in love, and that always makes the world seem delightful, no matter how insane your reality.* (Page 331)

*What will happen with us? Why am I worrying about this, by the way? What have I not yet learned about the futility of worry? So after a while, I stopped thinking about all this and just held him while he slept. I am falling in love with this man. Then I fell asleep beside him and had two memorable dreams.* (Page 333)

In the last country where Gilbert visits, Indonesia, an old medicine man named Ketut Liyer whom she had met in her previous visit to Bali reads her palm again and tells her exactly as she had been read two years earlier. Liyer tells her to keep her feet grounded on the earth to have a balanced life. He also suggests her to see the world with her heart instead of with her head. However, after Gilbert sees Liyer again, he says to her that she looks happier and brighter than the last time they met. In Indonesia, Gilbert falls in love with a Brazilian man named Felipe, when she starts to build her new chapter in life. She enjoys her surreal moment of life that makes her new world seem delightful despite the awful reality might be. Gilbert's tries to neither worry about her relationship nor her life; she decides to feel the moment and put anything else aside.

From the description above, the writer's opinion for both *Los Angeles Times* and *Alan Richman's* reviews is that they concentrate to Gilbert's big decision in escaping journey. However, the reviews are so brief that other important aspects, like Gilbert's struggle on self-discovery and soul-searching and her survival in letting her old burdens go, were not discussed. Additionally, her story in three countries was slightly mentioned in *Los Angeles Times* review and was not mentioned in *Alan Richman* review at all, meanwhile the novel per se is about the author's journey to

deal with her crisis. In brief, the writer thinks that *Los Angeles Times* and *Alan Richman*'s reviews would catch the readers' attention to read the novel although their depiction of Gilbert's struggle is too general to summarize a good story inside the novel.

## CONCLUSION

From the discussion in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that *PublishersWeekly*'s review represents an excellent point of view in reviewing Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love* by. *PublishersWeekly* depicts the novel in a brief sight yet highlights the strong points of the novel, namely Gilbert's struggle as the main character and the way Gilbert deals with other characters by doing an epic journey to the three different countries. In its review *PublishersWeekly* states that the style of Gilbert's writing catches the readers' attention well.

Furthermore, the other reviews by *LosAngeles* and *Alan Richman* say that *Eat, Pray, Love* give the readers an extraordinary experience of the main character. They mention the excitement of Gilbert's journey as well, however, they slightly review the struggles and problems that Gilbert encounters, which are the reason for her doing the journey. Besides, the experiences in three countries are not discussed. Due to the brief reviews given by both *LosAngelesTimes* and *Alan Richman*, the strong points of the novel are not quite described.

In conclusion, according to the writer and based on the reviews displayed, this novel provides a real life problem along with its extraordinary survival. However, that becomes the strong point of this novel and has been proven by the positive reviews from the experts. Moreover, *Publishers Weekly*'s review is a good example to review this novel since the *Publishers Weekly* brings up the best points of the novel. Meanwhile the reviews of *Los Angeles Times* and *Alan Richman* are somehow simply brief that they do not accentuate the essential points of the novel like *Publishers Weekly*.